

From: Meenakshi Srinivasan [<mailto:edleaders@yahoo.com>]

Sent: Thursday, April 07, 2016 1:09 PM

To: CFIRD

Cc: Merc News; India Currents

Subject: The Furore over "India"

Honorable Members of the Committee for Curriculum Frameworks,

I have been bombarded by several emails/ petitions/ articles regarding the proposed changes on the 6th/7th grade curriculum standards to be adopted in teaching History/ Social Studies in California that will not be reviewed for another 10 years. Just as we successfully separated Church from State in "modern" Europe, I think we need to separate "politics" from "academia" in the 21st century.

That said, I am an Education Consultant and Educator who is currently also a substitute teacher in one of our school districts and have been exposed to the K-12 curriculum for over 20 years. California is very fortunate in having a very diverse student population and its teaching staff is also becoming diverse. Internet has made access to information easier and for the most part, I find teachers becoming very innovative in bringing in "human resources" like people from that culture or country etc. that they are studying along with documentaries, videos etc.

Given that actuality on the ground, we now turn to the value of CDE in defining standards for teaching History to our students. Ancient Indian history is taught in 6th grade as part of one of the 4 major civilizations and under that, Hinduism is covered. This has been an area of contention since the early 2000s as the current, educated Indians who have become comfortable with Western academia have found a voice and a collective one with the spread of the internet. The current recommendations proposed keeping in mind modern Pakistan is irrelevant as Pakistan did not exist before 1947 and the timeline for Ancient India predates even Christ.

I reviewed those textbooks for a small group of concerned parents in the early 2000s and what I found then were disconnected bits of information presented as Ancient Indian History. If we define a timeline for a History textbook then we need to stick to it. We say the timeline is about Ancient India predating Christ and then we show pictures of a beggar next to a garbage heap in an overpopulated, modern Indian town with an underpaid, and overworked municipality. I think there is a serious disconnect here. If our purpose is to study modern India and the value of the Swacch Bharat campaign of current Prime Minister Narendre Modi, then that photo is very valuable. I can recommend some incredible photographs if the CDE approved textbook publishers don't know of any. The narrative in one textbook contained the word "Hindu Belief" and the workbook that goes with it has the entire "mandala" (that, by the way, is a Buddhist construct) worked out on the main "beliefs" and this word is repeated over 30 times while the Judaism chapter contained the word "belief" fewer than 10 times. This is yet another subtle "messaging" of Hinduism being one of belief rather than experience.

Hinduism on the contrary has survived constant onslaught of marauding armies, massacring armies that make Hitler look like a flea (the very word Hindukush mountain range to be found in modern Afghanistan bear the testimony to this as it means "the range where the Hindus were slaughtered") and that is because of its spiritual practices that continue to question what this universe is all about, who we are and what is the interaction and understanding between the manifest world and the unmanifest. That is why scientists like Einstein, Schrodinger and Heisenberg found great value in the vedic texts to postulate their unified theories that bridge the gaps between Newtonian Physics (manifest world) and that of the quantum world (unmanifest).

Unless Hinduism is accepted as a way of life where the pursuit is as much about human consciousness with physical well-being as opposed to a linear pursuit of physical wealth that includes aggrandizement of money, power, land and "knowledge", this conflict will never get resolved. Further, if we have to educate our children in the 21st century where socio-economic structures are constantly being strained with new technology and global economic forces, not to mention the real threat of global warming, we need to leverage this introduction to Hinduism by showing how some humans who asked metaphysical questions could not be 'erased' by any number of conquests. Even in the Americas, native Americans were almost made extinct with European colonizers. Not so in India.

There is a beautiful story of Alexander- the 1st recorded European who came to India and got his dose of Indian metaphysics. Use such documents. There are parallel Chinese traveller documents too after the time of the Buddha. Tell the "story" from the perspective of the socio-economic structure as mentioned in those texts written by those Greeks and Chinese- not manipulated, colonial texts whose political reasoning was to demean an ancient culture and make it their "white burden" to re-educate. Let me not get started with the most maligned, viciously twisted attacks of the Indian "caste" system (which was a poor "translation" of the varnaashrama dharma) and the Manu Smriti. Email me if you want clarity on that too.

I hope we, as educators, see the light and not be swayed by political forces. The Hindu goddess of learning, Sarasvati, is depicted wearing "white" as it is the non-color that contains all colors. Education is about being "uncolored" while containing all perspectives within its folds. Fun fact: Her other name is Bharati as she is also the "patron" Goddess of Bharata aka India. And the reason why she was picked and not Lakshmi- her counterpart for wealth is because the fundamental basis for Hinduism and India is not "wealth" but "wisdom" and the Western colonizers could never understand how an entire civilization thought thus and gave more importance to wisdom than wealth because they were the Hiranyakshas and Hiranyakashipus (materialistic demons as per our mythologies) who saw only "Gold". Today, post-colonization, modern India is determined to regain her "material" wealth as well as retain her intellectual, spiritual wealth. The reinstatement of the three goddesses of Shakti/ Durga (power), Lakshmi (wealth) and Sarasvati (knowledge/ wisdom) core to a successful worldly life has been a constant throughout Indian history and Hindu culture and will continue to greater strength as this century unfolds.

Teaching Hinduism to 21st century students will open the mind to an alternative idea of human existence that can easily be comfortable in a material world with a peaceful mind contemplating the unmanifest. That is the very basis of modern science too- the unified theories of the 20th century that made sense of Newton as well as Einstein. Nanotechnology of the 21st century is refining that and moving towards a cleaner, green future and that would explain the renewed interest in yoga and meditation, practices that go back millennia but practiced across the world today. Last year, the United Nations resolved to have an International Yoga Day and the 1st one had 192 countries participate. That is the power of "Hinduism"- a way of life where humans dared to question their existence beyond the physical and it finds resonance in any human being who asks the same.

Sincerely,

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Life is a fact, living is an art ~ Sri Sri Ravi Shankar, Founder, Art of Living Foundation .